

## Deschutes County Local Working Group Meeting 2017

February 23, 2017

### Introductions

#### Purpose of meeting

- Annual opportunity to connect with natural resource partners to identify priority natural resource issues. Identify places/issues where NRCS can contribute
- Share ongoing and upcoming partner conservation efforts and programs

### Resource Concerns

- Irrigation Efficiency
  - Gap in funding for small, private landowners
  - Irrigation mismanagement leading to weedy invasive issues
  - Difficult to reach population
    - 5-40 acre parcels
    - New landowners
    - Previously abandoned/bank owned and neglected properties
    - Folks who are not primarily farmers
    - Lack of dollar incentives
    - Broken up irrigation systems, previously large lots not multiple ranchettes with awkward irrigation
    - NEW EFFORTS: POD groups
      - Current pilots Swalley and COID
  - Tail water concerns, excess water pushed through rotations, making those properties at the end unpredictable
  - Future benchmarks for efficiency in Irrigation Districts may be set by water needs for the Spotted Frog/ESA
  - How do we balance the public benefit with the cost to the landowner?
    - Ecosystem service credit systems?
    - Mitigation programs?
- Water lost in delivery estimated at 50%
- Irrigation district system improvement plans being developed by Farmers Conservation Alliance
- Basin Study Work Group working on long term planning effort for Deschutes water management
- Need for further water savings, such as pond lining in areas like Arnold Irrigation District
- Need for education on equipment maintenance
- Pilot projects for LISA/LEPA technologies
- Forestry
  - Fuels reduction
    - CWPP and WUI focus
    - La Pine Basin
    - Need more assistance in West Bend and Sisters areas
  - Forest health
    - Bark beetle
  - Challenges
    - Landowner engagement
    - Agencies need to pool together contacts and resources
    - Small lot owners

- “out of pocket” cost beyond program cost shares
  - Finding a balance between fuels reduction and wildlife needs
- Crops
  - Long-term nutrient deficiencies
  - pH changes due to years of fertilizer applications
    - Lime trials underway by OSUES
  - Soil Health
    - Paired comparisons underway to understand soil health for this area
- Noxious Weeds
  - Challenge: Title II funds may be going away, leaving a gap in funding
  - Juniper concerns throughout county

#### Current NRCS programs

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - Joint Chiefs’ initiative for fire risk reduction/forest health provides financial assistance in the greater La Pine area for practices such as pre-commercial thinning, slash treatment. Cooperative program with USFS, ODF, Deschutes county, Walker Range
  - Three Sisters Irrigation District Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCCP) EQIP funding for on farm irrigation improvements to complement TSID piping projects to finish their system improvement. Partner funding for TSID pipeline, barrier removal on Whychus creek diversions, stream channel improvements
  - Sage Grouse Initiative: Rangeland improvements in the sage grouse core area that includes some of eastern Deschutes county. Mostly juniper control
  - Seasonal High Tunnel incentives to build High Tunnels to extend growing seasons for producers for the local food market
  - Organic Initiative provides financial incentives for a variety of practices to support certified and transitioning organic producers with natural resource issues
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) provides 5 year contracts to producers with payments to support existing conservation efforts and incentives to apply new conservation. Applicants must meet conservation thresholds with their current management to be eligible
- Agricultural conservation Easement Program (ACEP) financial assistance to organizations to purchase easements on agricultural land to keep it in agricultural production